

# Beauty and the Beast:

## How Smoking Ruins Your Beauty and Youth

Rachel Beanland,  
Public Information Coordinator  
DHEC

If you're like most American women, you've fought the aging process tooth and nail.

You've invested in expensive skincare products, treated yourself to occasional facials, and have even started lathering up on sunscreen out of doors.

This past summer, a British health study released through the office of Britain's chief medical officer confirmed the toll smoking is taking on women's bodies. The report listed common scars smoking leaves behind like wrinkles, crow's feet and sallow skin and cited that the combination of the three can age the face of a smoker by up to 20 years.

20 years. The difference between your twentieth and fortieth birthday, between the time you bring your first child home from the hospital and pack your second child off to college, between your thirtieth wedding anniversary and your fiftieth.

Many women don't even realize they're smokers until it's too late. They start out as social smokers, smoking sporadically when out with friends, yet before long they always seem to have a pack in their purses. So, the same women who take care of their skin, get plenty of sleep, eat healthy foods and exercise regularly wind up counteracting all of that with a single puff. Want to know how?

First off, smoking causes the blood vessels in the top layers of the skin to constrict, thus reducing the oxygen in the blood. Reduced levels of oxygen, not to mention the dehydration that also comes along with smoking, ages the skin much more quickly.

Smoking also thins the skin. Smokers typically have poor circulation, which results in thinner

skin. And thin skin is not in. British researchers who studied 25 pairs of identical twins in which one person was a lifelong smoker and one had never smoked used an ultrasound technique to gauge inner arm skin thickness. Smokers' skin

was 25 percent thinner than nonsmokers' skin, sometimes up to 40 percent thinner. Wondering why thin skin makes a difference? Take a look at the hands of someone over sixty. The blue lines painted all over the backs of their hands

weren't always so visible.

If you smoke, the one thing you probably think you've got going for you is your weight. Smokers are typically 4 pounds lighter than nonsmokers on average. Don't relax just yet. Smoking creates an imbalance of hormones in a woman's body that can lead to changes in body shape. The changes in hormone levels often result in an increased waist-to-hip ratio, so despite possibly weighing less, smokers' bodies tend to be more pot-bellied with spindly legs. Not to mention, smoking leaves you out of breath, which can make exercising much more difficult.

To this, add all the problems you already know about – the strained teeth and fingers, the bad breath, the stale smell that lingers in your hair and clothes. Still not convinced? In 1985, the term "smoker's face" was added to the medical dictionary.

There will always be plenty of age-defying beauty products to spend money on. There's a cream, ointment or (gulp) even surgery to cure, or at least temporarily mask, every wrinkle. Over the course of a lifetime, women can spend tens of thousands of dollars trying to beat time. The cheapest weapon, however, will continue to be never smoking at all. ■

**Many women  
don't even realize  
they're smokers  
until it's too late.**